



PRESS RELEASE

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Tunnel Repairs Will Improve Safety for Thousands of Travelers

PARWAN PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN | JUNE 15, 2011 — U.S. Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry and Minister of Public Works H.E. Abdul Qudos Hamidi joined local officials today as emergency repair work on the Salang Tunnel resumed. Completed by the Soviets in 1962, the tunnel is in a state of serious disrepair. Without emergency repairs, funded by USAID, the tunnel will soon become impassable for much of the year and hazardous for motorists. Improvements resulting from this project will keep traffic flowing until complete rehabilitation of the tunnel is accomplished.

Today's event reinforces the partnership between the United States and Afghanistan. USAID worked closely with the Ministry of Public Works in the planning, designing, and bidding processes for the emergency repair work, with Minister Hamidi providing leadership. The ministry will oversee road closures and public notices and perform 1.2 km of asphalt paving inside the tunnel, while USAID will pave the remaining 1.4 km of the tunnel and the approach galleries.

"I am very pleased to join Minister Hamidi today to mark the resumption of repair work on the Salang Tunnel," said Ambassador Eikenberry. "This tunnel represents just one example that the American people are committed to working in partnership with the Afghan people to improve lives."

While only 2.6 km long, the Salang Tunnel is arguably the most important stretch of highway in Afghanistan, with about 7,000 vehicles passing daily through the Hindu Kush between northern Afghanistan and Kabul. There are no alternative all-weather routes for transit between northern and southeastern Afghanistan. Alternate routes traverse through rough mountain passes at high elevations. Most include sections of narrow, unpaved trails with variable stream and river crossings. Long winters make passage via these alternate routes impossible for months at a time. Keeping the Salang Tunnel passable to increasing traffic is vital to the security and economy of Afghanistan.

Complete rehabilitation of the tunnel is needed for the long term. USAID plans to fund the design. The World Bank is expected to support the permanent reconstruction work beginning in 2014 after completion of an alternate bypass route, the Dushi - Bamyan - Parwan Highway.

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